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OF
PHILOSOPHY IN THE POETS.

BY

JAMES HUTCHISON STIRLING, LL.D. EDIN.

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OPENING LECTURE

TO THE

Edinburgh University Philosophical Society,

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BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

WHILE apologizing for the too evidently *partial* nature of this Lecture, I cannot let it leave my hands without a word of grief for the painful news just learned of the sad loss to the University and all of us of one of the kindest and friendliest voices that, on the evening in question, was heard in its reference. It is mine now, only, with sorrow, to bear in grateful memory the generous words then spoken by the wide scholar, the courteous gentleman, the high-hearted man, Principal Sir Alexander Grant. Peace to his manes! May his memory ever remain green among us!

One word of respectful thanks I beg to tender to the Philosophical Society, as well for its kind reception of this Lecture, as for the compliment of its obliging request to publish it.

EDINBURGH, *December 1, 1884.*



OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE POETS.

MR PRINCIPAL AND GENTLEMEN,—The alliance between poetry and philosophy, any more than that between mathematics and metaphysics, is no affair, as we all know, of yesterday. If Thales, and Pythagoras, and Plato were at once *mathematicians* and philosophers, not less were Xenophanes, and Parmenides, and Empedocles at once *poets* and philosophers. Nor are these all; there were others, both in Greece and Rome, equally beneficiaries of the double name. In modern Europe similar examples may be easily seen to abound; and a more splendid alliance of poetry and philosophy than that represented in the Baghavat Gita of the Orientals, it were difficult to find.

Evidently, at once from as much as that, the general theme of our title is far beyond the compass of a single lecture, if even within the compass, the

power of a single man. I propose, therefore, to come home, and to confine myself to what relative material we possess in England. But here, too, the compass is enormous; and still further limitation seems simply *de rigueur*.

Now, it needs but a glance to discover that English poetry, in the first place, falls into *three* great periods. There is a period of, so far, homogeneous poetry down to and inclusive of Milton; following whom, we may say, there is a second period, from Dryden and Pope down to Cowper; and, lastly, there is a third period, from Scott and Wordsworth down to Browning and Tennyson. These are well-marked periods; and each, for its part, has largely, or on the whole, a quality of its own. The poetry of the first period, with the *kings* in it—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton—is undoubtedly to be hailed as what poetry should be,—true poetry, genuine poetry, the poetry of nature and the soul; and it will always be interesting to inquire into the causes, historical or other, that could have led such poetry—the poetry, as I say, of nature and the soul—to have been followed by a poetry so unlike itself as the Queen Anne poetry of society and wit. The mighty resumption of nature and the soul by the poets that directly preceded Tennyson—that is a much more

intelligible matter. There is a gradation here that cannot possibly be found in the middle of the steep contrast that separates Shakespeare and Milton on the one hand from Dryden and Pope on the other. Such poets as Young, Thomson, Goldsmith, really had a great deal in them of what we may call the resumption of nature and the soul; and it was quite in order that, with these before him, Dr Thomas Percy was led to gather and to publish, in 1765, those grand old ballads that constitute his *Reliques of English Poetry*. About the same time, too, it was that Macpherson published his *Ossian*; and it cannot be denied that there is at least in that work a certain ring of nature, at all events, a something that powerfully affects the imagination, and leads it back to what we may call primary influences—love and battle, mountain and cloud and storm. Napoleon, with his big mind already Plutarch-drunk, is there too strongly in proof for any supporting of the negative. Cowper, now, was born in 1731; and we cannot find it singular that, with all these influences in face of him, he published his *Task* in 1785. The poems of Burns appeared a year later; and when we consider that that poet was not only submitted to pretty well the same English literature as Cowper, but that he had before him, in Scottish poetry, not only Allan

Ramsay—and Allan is nature itself—not only Allan Ramsay, but quite a multitude of the most charming songs and ballads, we cannot say, great as his genius was and original his product, we cannot say that there was anything here absolutely singular or inexplicable,—a poet-soul being once for all given, that is.

We can largely account, then, for the Percy Ballads, Cowper, and Burns. Now, these three forces, with the mighty movements that accompanied and followed the French Revolution, have really in them all that is necessary to enable us to understand—apart from consideration of the souls themselves—the advent of Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Campbell, and, with or after these, of Moore, Byron, Shelley, Keats, who themselves, again, are the natural predecessors of Browning, Tennyson, and the altogether innumerable later vocalists, that seem to make the literature of England but one piping now.

When one thinks of all that these three periods mean, one inclines to listen to the poets and philosophers of other countries who pronounce England *par excellence* the land of poetry. There are plenty of poets in other countries, and great ones, too—a Homer, a Dante, a Calderon; but still we rarely find in them that *tone*, that peculiarity of inspiration

that constitutes the distinctive characteristic of the English poet. In short, one feels rather tempted to fancy that if, in other countries, poetry, on the whole, presents itself as the language of men, surely it comes in England with the language of the gods. The poet here, the Shakespeare, the Milton, veritably speaks as though in the tongue of a loftier and diviner dwelling-place. He is exalted. All externality is as if fused and harmonized and made essence in that one grand *tone* of his that is prophecy, ecstasy, inspiration itself. Here, at last, it seems to be that we have, in good truth, the *poet* with his garland and his singing-robcs about him. His voice, as Hazlitt, altering a word from Milton, says of him—his voice rises “like a stream of rich-distilled perfumes.”

Now, there cannot be a doubt that much of this peculiarity in the poetry of England is due, as it were, to the mood—the hushed, hallowed, solemnized, sublimed mood of philosophy. Even of Spenser Milton says, “Him I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas;” and, certainly, these are the two greatest philosophical names throughout the whole of the Middle Ages. We may, then, not be without reasonable *surmise* in approaching English poetry in the search of philosophy.

In this reference, and as regards the third period,

the great name of Wordsworth would alone suffice to justify the styling of it as a philosophical one. But Wordsworth is not alone, and many of his co-mates would only join him in the claim. Almost without a single exception, indeed, the poets of this period whom I have already named, may be regarded as philosophical—Coleridge, Campbell, Byron, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson. Evidently, therefore, even adequately to discuss, on the question of philosophy, our third period alone would yield matter for quite a series of lectures. Accordingly, I propose to leave it now untouched, and to pass at once further.

As regards the second period, it is here we find the poets who, for the most part, are expressly termed philosophical. Nearest the third period there is Cowper, for instance, at once philosophical and religious. A true poet, he is most natural, spontaneous, full, a facile master of the telling phrase. Humanity is dear to him, his country is dear to him, his friends are dear to him. Mild reflection can settle down with him on each of the common interests of social mankind. An innocent moral thoughtfulness and a thoughtful innocent morality present him at once as the poet and the philosopher. His philosophy makes his religion a truth; and his religion makes his philosophy a life. Than the *Task* I know no poem that

one can recur to with a steadier, if only with a mild and gentle, pleasure.

Beattie, some four years younger than Cowper, but preceding him before the public, not only wrote philosophy in verse, but was supposed to write it also in prose. Still I fancy it will be difficult to find nowadays a single student who has read the *Essay on Truth*.

I never take up Beattie's verse, however, be it as it may with his prose, without being struck with such assonance in it to what I have called nature and the soul, as renders it in my eyes worthy of a place in the third period rather than in the second. It appears to me that the Spenserian stanza is managed in it with a power that would do no discredit to the greatest poets that have ever used it,—Byron, Shelley, Thomson, or Spenser himself,—while I find constantly also present the accents and the music of a true inspiration. The poem itself—*The Minstrel*—does indeed open with a grandeur that, I think, proves this:—

“ Ah ! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar ;
Ah ! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war ;

Checked by the scoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote has pined alone,
Then dropped into the grave, unpitied and unknown !”

But I may take the poets of the second period pretty well together. Gray is undoubtedly a poet, and he even writes an expressly philosophical poem in Latin. The famous *Elegy* certainly deserves all the fame it gets; the poetry in it is pleasing and true, and in its bland and pensive reflectiveness it may claim to be considered philosophical. There are grand stanzas in the *Progress of Poesy* on Shakespeare, on Milton, and on Dryden; and that poem and *The Bard* are of a quite Pindaric splendour. Collins is an exquisite poet; his lovely verses ought to be bound up always with those of the young men, Shelley and Keats. Goldsmith, for his smoothness and his simple natural description, will always be a general favourite, but he has little to offer us, any more than Collins, in the way of philosophy. Young, Thomson, Akenside, Armstrong may be more promising in that respect. They are even, for the most part, specially named philosophical poets; yet it must be confessed that, if it is for philosophy they are to be valued, there is but little of true philosophy to be found in any of them. Armstrong, however in other

respects praiseworthy, is hardly worth mentioning here; and Akenside, at least so far as I must be true to my own opinion, though immensely better, and really in some regards to be pronounced a poet, is not, in any way for us, particularly valuable. He has an inscription to a monument for Shakespeare, which is really poetry, and, *me judice*, the best thing he has done. One is pleased, from a similar inscription, to perceive that he knew and appreciated Chaucer.

One, of course, can say only good of the poet of the *Seasons*. Thomson was a true poet, and no one can read his two great poems without constant satisfaction and an ever recurring delight. Still there is nothing to call for any particular attention on our part, in their regard, so far as philosophy is concerned. Young, in that respect, as he appears at once to us, would seem to have more and even special pretensions. He is everywhere specially named a philosophical poet. Bulwer-Lytton talks of the *Night Thoughts* as a very mine of wealth; and so it is, possibly, to any one who would be adventurous enough to descend into it. But such adventurers are rare. There can be no doubt that the poem is full of quite magnificent sound. If there is not inspiration, there is at least the *intonation* of it. We are all familiar, I daresay, with the passage—

“ The bell strikes one. We take no note of time
But from its loss : to give it then a tongue
Is wise in man. As if an angel spoke,
I feel the solemn sound : if heard aright,
It is the knell of my departed hours.
Where are they ? With the years beyond the flood.
It is the signal that demands despatch.
How much is to be done ! My hopes and fears
Start up alarmed, and o’er life’s narrow verge
Look down—on what ? A fathomless abyss,
A dread eternity ! ”

Young must have often hugged himself, even as he at random struck the instrument, over such a lucky chord as that. Still, in the midst of admiration, one finds one’s self constantly speculating about the artifice of it. We find ourselves looking at a dumb actor on the stage who, without a word as it were, imitates by gesture only all the raptures of the most glorious speech.

Of the poets named philosophical in the second period, Dryden and Pope are undoubtedly the greatest. But perhaps philosophy then must just be regarded as philosophy then, and something very unlike philosophy now. We have not yet, as a public, come to a definite conclusion in our judgment of these poets. There are still a good number of very estimable intellects who, like Hume, read, let us say, only Pope.

Such are even repelled by the peculiar spirit and peculiar modes of both the first and third periods, and regard *sound sense* and *good taste* as confined to the second period alone. There is certainly a manliness in Dryden, as well as an elastic vigour of language quite strikingly *home* (these are grand verses to the Protector); while, as for Pope, suppose given him the element he was to work on, it is quite certain that it was not in the power of man to carry that element up into anything more perfectly concinnate, into anything more perfectly clean, trim, neat, or more thoroughly bedded and bordered. Dryden had the force and the flash in him of the doughtiest broadsword that was ever wielded; while Pope stood with a rapier before him that, subtly-swift and subtly-bright, was utterly intraversable, and reached to pierce almost before it was seen. Yet of the whole period, it must be said that it took the ignobler side. It turned to the negative alone, and could only see what was worldly in man. The small particular self that was in him, his secret indulgences, his make-believes, his prudences, his careless cold duplicities—these were all that it had any credit for. Chastity was but artificial to woman, and honesty was no less artificial to man. Artifice, in fact, is the word. We see it in their dress and address socially

as men. We see it in the turn of their thoughts ; we see it in their verses, whether rhymed or blank. In regard to the last, the blank verse alone, think of the vast contrast in Milton ! Artifice, externality of effort, flatness, prose, something wooden and uninspired—that is what we find in the blank verse of the whole period. How different Milton ! Why, Milton cannot get quit of the Delphic exhalation even when at his commonest. Yet Dryden almost apologizes for Milton's blank verse ! He says he “will not justify Milton for his blank verse, though he may excuse him”—by what ? By what will a Dryden excuse a Milton's blank verse ?—“By the example,” he goes on, “of Hannibal Caro and the other Italians.” Hannibal Caro and the other Italians ! I hope, indeed, that we may be able to excuse Milton's blank verse because of Hannibal Caro ! But Dryden continues, “Whatever causes Milton alleges for abolishing rhyme, his own particular reason is plainly this, that rhyme was not his talent ; he had neither the ease of doing it, nor the graces of it !” And Dryden says all this in the face of the *Penseroso* and the *Allegro*, in face of the *Hymn to the Nativity*, and the *Sonnets*, in face of the *Lycidas* ! Let us just think of these, let us just think of the *Lycidas* alone, and let us recall to our ears for comparison the favourite murmurs of either

Dryden or Pope! Here, for example, are a pair of couplets of Dryden—

“ Restless, unfixed in principles and place ;
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace.”

“ In friendship false, implacable in hate,
Resolved to ruin, or to rule the State.”

And here are a pair of very similar ones from Pope; for both Pope and Dryden evidently very much affect the same sort of rocking-horse of a verse—

“ Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,
Now trips a lady, and now struts a lord.”

“ Like gentle Fanny, was my flowery theme ;
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.”

There are very worthy people still in existence to whom such alternating see-saw, such ever-recurring mechanical balance, is still the only poetical music—
“ A painted mistress, or a purling stream!” Evidently, however, if applicable in the mere lamp-light of conventional repartee and retort, such artificial pendulum of speech is no vehicle for the poetry of nature and of one's own soul. Then we look for such as this—

“ Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,

I come to pluck your berries, harsh and crude ;
And, with forced fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear
Compels me to disturb your season due,
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime—
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.”

Dryden, in the face of such rhymes as these, could tell Milton that “rhyme was not his talent; that he had neither the ease of doing it, nor the graces of it!” And then mounting his rocking-horse, he cried—“ Look at me ; take example by me,

‘ Resolved to ruin, or to rule the State ;
In friendship false, implacable in hate.’ ”

This, of course, is largely to do injustice to both Dryden and Pope ; but still it is to do them a certain justice too. I have already characterized with laudation the general features of either ; and that laudation would only grow—greatly grow—did I enter into details. *Alexander's Feast*, for example, is the finest thing of the kind in the language. Yet, as one sees, it is nature that is on the one side, convention that is on the other ; and one feels waived back even to Cowper. One feels (at least while this

mood is on one) that, if the matchless *Satires* and the *Task* lay together, and we could only occupy ourselves for the moment with one or other, we would spontaneously turn to the natural grace and pleasing simplicity of the latter.

We have now reached, ascendingly, the first period, and, on the question of philosophy, we may conceive ourselves secluded here to Milton and Shakespeare. Chaucer is great, and very great. His *Prologue* alone is itself a whole world of characters, of living men and women. And this is a praise we learn to give from Homer, who is less admirable, perhaps, for his action, battles, nature, etc.—grand as it all is—than, so to speak, for his selected and associated characters. Homer has contrived, though in a Greek world, to exhibit to us the types of humanity as humanity. A like praise, but of course on the appropriate level, must be given to Burns. In him, too, we have a world of its own kind, and with all its naturally differentiated human beings. That, then, and in the highest degree, is the praise of Chaucer, whom no student can pretermit, who would do justice to his own self. Milton, as we have seen, opines Spenser to have been a greater philosopher than Scotus or Aquinas. That may be; nevertheless, that is hardly the character he assumes for us. He is a

magistral bard, and we feast on the rich tenderness of his verse; but we are soon cloyed by it. I think I have only heard of two men who ever got to the end of the *Faery Queen*. What I know best and admire most myself is the *Epithalamium*. That is a grand strain, exultant, voluptuously exultant, with all the profuse joy of the occasion.

Milton, as we know, is the most erudite of poets. He has fed, like a bee, steadily on every peculiar flower of poetry,—Greek, Latin, or Italian,—and absorbed into himself the very essence of its peculiarity, if only once for all in its kind genuine. Now, this has largely done him injustice with foreigners, who praise him, indeed, as classical, as eloquent, &c., but do so only at second hand,—in point of actual fact neglecting and passing over him as only classical, only eloquent—that is, as only imitation and an echo. Now that is a vast mistake. With all his culture, Milton is the richest, the truest, the most genuine and original pure poet that ever lived. “O,” exclaimed a young German lady, unknown to me, travelling in a railway carriage, to an English gentleman accompanying her, in answer to her fervid enthusiasm for our Keats’s and our Shelleys, only cared for Guitty, as he called him—“O,” exclaimed she, “Go-ethe* ”

* Go-ethe—enormous depth requires to be given to the o in the diphthong.

is all very well, but what is there in Goethe to the fawlumes of music in Milton!" And that, gentlemen, is the truth; there *are* volumes of music in Milton. I believe Milton to excel all pure poets in the fitting word, in the fitting phrase, in the informing image, perhaps even in the uplifting and ennobling emotion; but I believe him still more to excel all other poets in music. There are many other poets musical, but they are not musical as Milton is musical. There is not a little of the *Gallus* of Virgil, for example, transferred to the *Lycidas* of Milton; and in Virgil it is not only exquisitely beautiful, but also exquisitely musical. Still, I think it will be generally acknowledged that even there Milton has made beauty itself more beautiful; and, very especially and above all, music's self more musical. But the *Lycidas* is not alone for either beauty or music. These half-dozen sonnets are instinct with both; and then the deep divine tone, the harmonies, as of the firmamental spheres, that sound and resound all through that inspired and unparalleled *Hymn to the Nativity*. The *Comus*, again, is not only the most entire and exquisite poetry all through, but for it alone we must name Milton a philosophical poet. Nor are there wanting strains of philosophy throughout his two epics. Again and

again in these do lines and passages occur that are, in that reference, specially suggestive. Here are verses, for example, that are even scientifically suggestive—

“What if the sun
Be centre to the world ; and other stars,
By his attractive virtue and their own,
Incited, dance about him various rounds ?”

Generally, I fear, we read such intimations as these in Milton quite as we would read them in any poet of our own day. We never think that the *Paradise Lost* preceded the *Principia* by actually twenty years. We forget that ; and accordingly a knowledge, apparently, of the general system of gravitation does not surprise us in Milton. Even in Shakespeare, language as of modern astronomy we pass by without a thought. Yet no good Catholic dared, during the life of either of them, resist the express prohibition of the Pontiff. Why, the date of the condemnation of Galileo is as late as 1633, when Milton was 25 years of age, and Shakespeare actually 17 years dead ! Milton could have learned much from Kepler, certainly ; but we are not prepared to hear that Kepler could have reached Milton. There is a long passage in the 8th book of the first epic, where

Adam in Paradise puts astronomical doubts to the angel that are cogent still !

Of philosophical allusions in Milton there are a great many more than I have here time to quote. One passage runs thus, for example, where it is the angel speaks—

“ Whence the soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive or intuitive ; discourse
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same.”

These are but few words, yet they involve assonances to quite a number of modern philosophical doctrines. Reason, for example, is declared to be the very being of the soul. Then that reason should be either intuitive or discursive, that is precisely the usual division now of intellect into the logical faculties on the one hand, and the perceptive on the other. But, more than that, there are involved in the distinction two doctrines most characteristically Kantian. It is absolutely Kantian, in the first place, to ascribe to man only a discursive faculty, and, by contrast, an *intuitus*, an *intellectuelle Anschauung* to diviner natures ; while, in the second place, to describe the two faculties as “ differing but in degree, of kind the same,” is simply

to *translate*—is simply *by anticipation* to translate the passage in Kant, where the two faculties are judged “to spring probably from a common but to us unknown root.”

Milton appears to have thought a great deal on the subject of free-will. Allusions to it perpetually occur in the course of his great epic; and in two of them, one in the 9th and the other in the 12th book, we find what I regard as the key to the solution required. The first is to this effect,—

“Secure from outward force, within himself
The danger lies, yet lies within his power :
Against his will he can receive no harm.
But God left free the will ; for what obeys
Reason is free.”

The other passage is this,—

“Since thy original lapse true liberty
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells
Twinn’d, and from her hath no dividual being.”

One sees from these passages that the key lies in the word *reason*. This, gentlemen, may prove very indefinite and only disappoint. Perhaps I may be able to explain it into clearness and interest, if not satisfaction.

The single lever of the opponents of free-will

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lies in the one word *motive*. "I assent to this," says Hobbes, "a man has freedom to *do*, if he will;" "but whether he has freedom to *will*," that I question. "A wooden top lashed by the boys—if it were sensible of its own motion—would think this motion proceeded from its own will, unless it felt what lashed it. And is a man any wiser when he runs to one place for a benefice, or to another for a bargain, because he *thinks* he does it without other cause than his own will, and sees not the lashings which cause that will?"

You see, then, gentlemen, what Hobbes means by the "lashings" are the *motives*. A benefice lashes one man, and a bargain another. Now, in the first place, it is quite evident that, if a man is to act under motives, he must, by the very terms, by the very premises, have a will that is, at least so far, capable of *indetermination*—so far, that is, as by the very terms, by the very premises, there must be *an* interval, make it as short as you please, for the *deliberation* which the very terms, the very premises, imply. The terms, the premises, grant me *choice* in the first instance; and if I am to *choose*, I must be allowed an interval of suspense. Now, how is the will during the interval—determined or indetermined? The latter surely. As I say, by

the very terms, the very premises, the necessitarian himself allows, and must allow, this. If I am asked whether I shall have a peach or a plum, even he must grant me one moment of deliberation when I am *indetermined*, though certain to sink under the superior attractions of the peach the next moment. Of course, it is never to be asserted by either side that any action is unpreceded by a motive. Even when Mr Alexander tells Mr Mill that he can touch which side of his nose he pleases, he has not escaped from a motive. The very side he touches is itself, as seen in the fancy, a motive. So impossible is it to act without a motive that, when placed in circumstances where the will is perfectly balanced, we find that to be able to act we must give ourselves a motive. We say we will just take the nearest one, or the smallest one, etc.; or we even simply toss up. At the game of *écarté*, for example, it often happens that he whose turn it is to play finds himself with two kings in his hand. If he retains the right one, he will gain the point; if he sacrifices it, he will lose the point. Now, he has no means of knowing which is which; how, then, is he to find a motive for the action that is incumbent on him? With a card in each hand, but which card he knows not, he turns his hands rapidly round, the one over the other, leaving it to chance

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when and which he shall let go. Chance, then, is the only motive here, if chance can be called a motive. Even should physical chop-logic, in its obstinate wrangling way, object that the card that fell, fell in consequence of physical weariness or a sense of physical sufficiency, etc., and the will, consequently, was not free even there, I should point out that the only motive *in the will itself* was still chance; and, if a physical antecedent was still insisted on, I should say: Just so; if you will have it so; then the physical antecedent was the motive; and what I am at present speaking about is the necessity of the will to look out for a motive, even when it has none at hand.

That is certain, then; if the will is to act, it must have a motive. But does it follow that a motive to the will is as the lashing of a scourge to a top? Hobbes, as we see, even to get the analogy, is obliged to invert the positions. The external lashing is to become an internal motive; the internal motive is to become, is to be regarded as, an external lashing. The top, if you recollect, is not to know what lashed it from without, but only its own motion from within, as the man is supposed to think, not of the benefice or the bargain, but only of his own action, his own motion, like that of the top. But there is a great

Natural action = free action, & we born for freedom in  
 vain anywhere else. I do admit that reason must be  
 a machine. "But there is a great difference  
 Of Philosophy in the Poets."

difference between a motive from without and a motive from within. I am anything but free if a stronger man lay hold of me; then, plainly, I am as the top under the lash; I am under an external necessity; I am in the power of another. But if the motive, the source of action, be from within, it may not at once follow that I am equally bound; it may not follow that I am in the power of another at all. We generally say that what moves from within moves of itself; still I will allow that, if the motive, even though within, be alien, the will that happens to be submitted to that motive is not free, is in the power of another. But what is an *alien* motive—what can be the power of another conceived as from within? The greeds of the senses are such. In these, in a greed, I am in the power of another; I yield to an alien motive. And quite similar greeds are our individual passions. He who yields to revenge, and murders, is no more free than he who yields to appetite, and gets drunk. That alone is free that obeys only its own self; but the will that murders, the will that gets drunk, does not obey, but, in simple truth, *disobeys* its own self. Nay, for the most part, it itself, such will itself, will confess this. So much is this the case, that such will usually says, "The devil entered into me." Man, that is—and

this is the point—possesses the universal. That alone is free that obeys only its own self. The universal now is alone my true self; and so, only truly do I obey myself when I obey it. Then I am free; I emphatically obey *myself*. I am not *obliged* to obey any *particular*, as so much externality of motive that simply lashes me. The lower animals *are* so obliged. They know no universal; they obey ever particulars; they follow only finite aims. Man is not so. Man is double. He is submitted, not only to the particular of the senses and passions, but to the universal of reason; and will, when it obeys the universal of reason, obeys its own self, and nothing either alien or external. Man, then, is free in that he can obey his own true will, his own true self,—for his own true will, his own true self, is reason. Man can, of course, set himself against this universal, and stubborn himself in himself,—stubborn himself in his will simply as *his* will. That is not a rare experience—a man who *will* do, or, oftener, who will *not* do, simply because such is *his* will. He *will*; or he will *not*. The ordinary necessitarian ought, by-the-bye, to find that a case against him. Here is a will, a particular will, too, that just wills its own will as its own will. The adherent of free-will, however, is very differently situated; he grants at once that that

is not free-will; that that is precisely the opposite of free-will; that that is the particular merely, and not the universal; that that is the particular against the universal; that that is bondage, slavery; that that is the will—man—in the power of another.

But, gentlemen, you may say that is all very fine, that indefinite, grand, abstract something you call reason, the universal, my own true self; but what is it? where is it? how am I to find it? Ordinary people cannot be expected to get at anything so very fine, indefinite, abstract, and high. Now, gentlemen, neither is that the case. On the contrary, even the most ordinary people may quite well see their way to reason as reason. The laws are there for the purpose. Reason as reason lies before them in the institutions, the ethical principles, the generalized ways, proclaimed or understood, of the society that supports them. More than that, gentlemen; for the purpose in hand you need not disturb yourselves by thinking of such great interests as law, etc., or of the difficulty and mere exception of the application in such reference. To be free at all times, to be free in the house or in the street, to be free here or to be free there, you have simply to be *reasonable*. You may be quite sure that you obey only your own self, that you are using absolute free-will, when you oil

the hinges of your door, or when you wipe your spectacles. All actions, however humble, that have their reason—a reason still leading, directly or indirectly, to the universal of reason, *the freedom of thinking*, are themselves free. The taking a black draught at the hands of the physician is an action of freedom. And granting the weed, the Indian weed itself, to be in any way beneficial, you may be quite assured, gentlemen, that you are only in the enjoyment of free-will when you pass a stocking wire through your occluded pipe.

The preceding is, I think, a fair statement—even an extended statement—of the doctrine of free-will from the point of view of the enfranchisement that lies in reason as reason; and it is that point of view which the quotations from Milton indicate. As regards the general subject, nevertheless, I fear we must not whistle yet; we are not yet quite out of the wood. There are still two foemen to interdict an exit. These are the predestinarian and the man of physical chop-logic already referred to. As not entering into the point of view immediately before us, I must leave them for the present to your own selves. A full exposition of the philosophical idea of contingency will perhaps reduce to silence the wrangle—not of the chop-logician, for never will any

man bring him to silence—but in your own breast, the wrangle in your own breast about the difficulties started by said logician, of how it was the creaking hinge, the blurred glass, the occluded pipe, the pathological constitution of the murderer, the equally pathological habit of the drunkard, etc., that, as antecedent to the will, still really conditioned it. Both these men, I think, you will ultimately find, you can meet on their own ground; but, when either the one or the other has you in the air, you may always, Antæus-like, recover your strength by touching again your veritable mother-earth of reason as reason. It was, for example, neither the bare creak nor the bare blur that as so much mere mechanical momentum simply *drove* you. Both creak and blur were transformed into a new element; they were dipped into the universal; they became considerations of reason as reason; and only as such considerations was it that they had the precise effect on you. And so it is always; you have a right to assert yourself free from the necessity of any particular, so soon as it has been once for all admitted into the emancipation of the universal. Milton, then, even at last, is perhaps not so far wrong when he holds that what obeys reason is free. I have not quoted much; but what I have quoted will suffice to prove Milton a philosophical poet.

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As for Shakespeare, we shall doubtless find in his case such philosophical character only deepened and widened. Poets, indeed, of the vast compass, of the immeasurable depth of mood, of both these men, can simply not help themselves—they must be philosophical. And that is as much as to say that the best and the highest poetry must always, in a sort, be philosophical. Malone, in his commentaries on Shakespeare, will be found to quote a remarkable passage to this effect from certain Latin prelections of the younger Lowth. The poetical faculty is there termed *quædam accessio* to philosophy; and no one, it is further affirmed, has ever yet carried up poetry *ad suum fastigium et culmen* unless he has, first of all, established the foundations of his art in *intima philosophia*. This general statement is illustrated and particularized by a direct reference to Shakespeare as really accomplishing more with regard to the passions than has ever yet been accomplished by all the philosophers of all the schools. Nor is this opinion less than the universal one. Shakespeare is now judged by civilisation as a whole, we may say, to have taken in humanity, life, the world, existence, into the widest, deepest, truest human mind that has ever confronted them. And, perhaps, of all the phrases that are in labour with

the naming and the praising of Shakespeare, that, the commonest, is still the best: he held the mirror up to nature, which just amounts to the same import. He was the vastest subject that ever took into himself the whole huge object. He held the mirror up to nature; it is nature herself that we have everywhere in Shakespeare. There are, indeed, a few who partially demur to this, in so far at least as concerns the mere language at times, and point to what they call occasional bombast. I recollect once at Paris of being surprised into a view of this kind. Ampère, a large and catholic mind of the completest culture, was lecturing in the *Collège de France* on Shakespeare, to whom he awarded the usual supremacy, objecting only to Othello being allowed to say, his eyes "dropped tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gums;" whereat the French student immediately in front of me gave sudden and relieving vent to an audible "*dégoûtant*." I was indignant, for I had never before taken note of the Arabian trees. I had always felt rather as if, somehow, in the midst of such overwhelming grandeur of emotion, they only added to it,—only added to it, in effect, with a beauty and a grandeur of their own. Attention being thus roused, however, one may admit that a passage does occur here and there in Shakespeare

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more or less, to say so, *stagey*. And, in the circumstances, the wonder would be that this were not so. The stage was a new thing then; and it was kings and such great people that were made largely to speak and move there. Shakespeare, as you know, talks of splitting the ears of the groundlings. Now, what *could* the "groundlings," suddenly admitted into this grand upper world, be supposed only breathlessly to expect? Why only, after all, just to *have* their ears "split." And what else could the very men who then wrote for them aim at? A score of hot-headed, hot-hearted young men, quite as strange to the new region as the groundlings themselves, they could all only emulously strive to outdo the one the other in some big effect. As they phrased it themselves, each, as he came, supposed himself "as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of them." Many of them, too, it is to be noted, not only wrote, but acted. Such and so placed, it is impossible to conceive of men to whom a certain amount of rant would come more natural. Is it so certain, too, that the present English stage—in that differing from the Continental one, which is simple—has not inherited *a stamp or two, a mouthing or two*, of this same rant? Shakespeare, now, was not only in the same circumstances, and among these men, but it was the very

plays of these men that he had often only to work on. What wonder if some *purpureus pannus*, some purple rag of the original, was occasionally left behind! Nay, a certain exaltation of speech must be allowed as even appropriate and opportune—must be hailed, indeed, as a veritable excellence and advantage then. How often, accordingly, have we not a real delight in the marvellous aptness of words that still appear not untinged with extravagance!

“ I’m rapt, and cannot cover  
The monstrous bulk of this ingratitude  
With any size of words.”

Is not that quite an enormously grand way of saying *Words fail?*

Again—

“ And his poor self,  
A dedicated beggar to the air,  
With his disease of all-shunned poverty,  
Walks, like contempt, alone.”

“ Its course will on  
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs  
Of more strong link asunder, than can ever  
Appear in your impediment.”

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“ Then was I as a tree  
Whose boughs did bend with fruit ; but in one night  
A storm, or robbery, call it what you will,  
Shook down my mellow hangings, nay, my leaves,  
And left me bare to weather.”

In all these passages there is the usual Shakespearian pomp, but quite as well the almost more than human Shakespearian felicity. How majestically fitting is that language always in the mouth of kings,—and we have a great deal to do with kings in Shakespeare. Almost it would seem as if the new stage, in its desire to astound the groundlings, did, of express purpose, introduce kings to stalk before them. I, the writer, am a king for the moment, and I shall make the actor a king.

“ Lend him our terror, dress him with our love,  
And give his deputation all the organs  
Of our own power.”

Ah ! kings and their glory, how great it is !

“ The gates of monarchs  
Are arched so high that giants may jet through  
And keep their impious turbans on, without  
Good morrow to the sun.

And these suggestions of the stage, what a source of reflection they were to Shakespeare ! He is not

more alive to the grandeur of kings than to their calamities—so to speak, to the unfortunate inhumanity of their mere position.

“ And what have kings, that privates have not too,  
Save ceremony ?  
And what art thou, thou idle ceremony ?  
What drink’st thou oft, instead of homage sweet,  
But poisoned flattery ? O, be sick, great greatness,  
And bid thy ceremony give thee cure !  
’Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,  
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,  
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
That beats upon the high shore of this world,  
No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,  
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave,  
Who, with a body filled and vacant mind,  
Gets him to rest, crammed with distressful bread.”

It is in such passages as these that we must be contented to see Shakespeare’s philosophy. And yet there are not wanting many references in Shakespeare which are almost, so to speak, professionally philosophical.

“ I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known.”

It is doubtless to his own reflection that Shake-

speare owes that, and yet we may say we have here a whole chapter of philosophy in a single line. The word, the spoken word, the written word, what a power it is! Mesmer tried once to think without words, but it nearly drove him mad.

In the reference before us, too, consider this gorgeously philosophical as gorgeously poetical passage—

“ Our revels now are ended : these our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air—into thin air ;  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve ;  
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind : We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of ; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”

Such a passage as this in Shakespeare has that in it which a philosophical head might brood over almost for a life-time. It breathes the very spirit of idealism and an idealism absolute. How *could* Shakespeare ever have come to such thoughts? These were days—those in which he lived—not of meditation and speculative melancholy, but of action,

victory, triumph. The whole island was at last about to become one, the national life was concentrating itself for an imperial existence, and, in very gage thereof, had in face of the entire world stretched forth the terrible right arm that smote to shatters the seemingly irresistible power of all-dominant Spain. Around him everywhere there was but the buoyant freshness of awakening spring, and the tree of life beside him was all in buds—buds religious, buds mercantile, buds poetical, buds political, buds philosophical, buds exploratory. All breathed vigour, victory, assurance, hope; yet England's greatest spirit was only sad—Shakespeare was only sad—was only sad, and looked even then, in the beginning of spring, to the far end of an ultimate winter, and an ultimate ruin! Even he himself seems surprised at this, his mood in the play, and as it were remonstrates with himself. As though in pain, he breaks off suddenly at the word "sleep," and murmurs, "Sir, I am vexed; bear with my weakness; be not disturbed by my infirmity; a turn or two I'll walk, to still my beating mind." To still his beating mind! Surely never before came there into human mind thoughts of quality to raise beating there more than those that are as a vast glory in that majestic—I may call it so—majestic *solemnisation*.

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And how did they come to him—where did Shakespeare get them? For there is more here than the mere final consummation of all things which our religion foretells us. There is here an actual confession of complete philosophical idealism. “We are such stuff as dreams are made of; these our actors were all spirits.” Berkeley himself, after the lapse of a century, could only repeat this.

It cannot be my purpose, gentlemen, to attempt to quote and comment upon all the innumerable philosophical pregnancies that one finds in Shakespeare. I will now make only one other reference, and then have done—

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

This, as one sees, concerns the problem of success. It is a wonderful thing success; and it is wonderfully conditioned. “It is very good of you,” says Fichte on one occasion, “that you and yours should so seriously interest yourselves in me, ‘aber dass sie und ich reussiren,’ but that they and I should succeed,—O, if the whole world were pleased to be so good as to worry itself sick in that regard, the whole world

would, with all its worryings, simply do nothing. It is ours to do our own in the matter; but the result belongs elsewhere." Now, gentlemen, I think Fichte hits the truth there. As Carlyle says, "A man shall and must be valiant; he must march forward and quit himself like a man—trusting imperturbably in the appointment and *choice* of the higher powers." It would thus appear that what we may call worldly push is neither advisable in itself nor as a means. But what comes then of the tide that Shakespeare would have us take for the joy, or leave for the misery, of a life? Why, even for that Fichte and Carlyle give the answer. It is our duty to stand there ever armed and ready to step into the boat that comes for us; but hardly our duty to be found always on the struggle and bawl. To keep ourselves armed, if we do keep ourselves armed, we shall find that quite work enough, without a struggle and without a bawl. Fichte well hits the mysteriousness of what it is to *reussiren*; and he has equally well hit the duty of keeping always armed. A thousand calls to that kind of bravery you will find in his letters to the noble woman to whom he was betrothed; and not one call did he not substantiate in his deeds. The very events of his life, too, proved the truth of his doctrine; again and again just saved from star-

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vation, success came to him at last as by a sudden and unlooked for flood. It was like the man that, as Shakespeare bids, he at once laid his hand upon the crest of the wave.

There are fine passages in Shakespeare, too, in the same connexion to this effect, that we must still keep ever working—ever on the move; “for emulation hath a thousand sons”—

“if you give way,  
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,  
Like to an entered tide, they all rush by,  
And leave you hindmost.”

That “entered tide” is quite a counterpart to the other one, and ought to be borne as vividly in mind.

“Perseverance, dear my lord,  
Keeps honour bright: To have done, is to hang  
Quite out of fashion, like a rusty nail.”

Where would Browning have been, or Tennyson, where would either have been had he but rested contented with his first works? And, from another point of view equally exigent, what would Carlyle have been had he but listened to his earliest judges?

It will be abundantly evident to you now, gentlemen, that to quote Shakespeare as relevant to

philosophy would prove an endless business, in which we need not limit ourselves, either, to the pregnant saws. Properly to exhibit the movement of his dramas; that, too, would be philosophy. Shakespeare is *the* born dramatist. For the evolution and development of action, incident, or character, there is no other artist, ancient or modern, that we can set at the side of him; in my poor opinion, there is no other that comes within an infinity of degrees of him. And how can it possibly be else, if, as I say, he be the vastest subject that ever took into himself the whole huge object?



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